

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting Summary

January 25, 2018 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM
MassDEP, One Winter Street, Boston, MA

Update on Recycling Markets & MassDEP Response

Greg Cooper of MassDEP provided an update on recent changes in recycling markets, how that has affected recycling in Massachusetts, and how MassDEP is responding to these issues. Due to the Chinese government's National Sword initiative, the import of recyclables into China decreased dramatically in late 2017 and early 2018. These issues have been most significant for mixed paper and mixed plastics (#s 3-7). Most other recyclables, such as cardboard, #1 (PET) and #2 (HDPE) plastics, and metals are continuing to move effectively to a mix of domestic and export markets.

However, while material recovery facilities (MRFs) have been able to continue to market and move materials, they have slowed down their processing lines to improve the quality of the bales they are producing and this has reduced their overall capacity. This has in turn caused MRFs to back up and be forced to turn away some incoming materials. Because of this, MassDEP has issued a number of waste ban waivers to allow for the temporary disposal of single stream recyclables when no other alternative is available and trucks have to be emptied. However, these represent a very small percentage (about 3%) of overall single stream recycling.

More recently, Massachusetts glass recycling markets have been hurt by the impending closure of the Ardagh bottle manufacturing plant in Milford, MA. Because this was the largest outlet for glass collected in Massachusetts, this has left many municipal drop-off programs and MRFs with limited options to accept glass. MassDEP is also issuing short term waste ban waivers for glass where necessary. At the same time, MassDEP is working with the recycling industry and municipalities to foster additional market outlets for glass in Massachusetts. We will continue to keep stakeholders up to date as these efforts progress.

MassDEP has visited MRFs and met with MRF operators. We are focusing on reducing contamination and improving recycling quality through the Recycling IQ tool kit for cities and towns, as well as conducting other similar outreach for businesses. MassDEP also will be issuing a new application for the Recycling Business Development Grant program in March and expects that program to focus heavily on improving the recycling infrastructure for single stream and glass recycling.

Q: Do waste ban waivers have a specified duration?

A: Yes, the duration is set depending on the request and need. These have often been two to four weeks in length, but could be as short as a day or two depending on the need. The duration is kept as short as possible as market conditions can shift. More than 20 waivers have been issued thus far. Currently, there are three outstanding waivers.

Q: Towns have expressed concern about residents being discouraged from recycling if the media reports that single stream recyclables are going in the trash. What is MassDEP doing to counter this?

A: MassDEP has had discussions with media outlets about what is going on in the marketplace. The message is consistent: recycling is, and always has been, a commodity market. The market will respond, and if China doesn't want materials, other countries will take them. Already we are seeing a growth in other Southeast Asia markets. Material is still being processed and recycled, except for relatively small amounts (approximately 2-3% of overall single stream recycling). MassDEP continues to promote the Recycling IQ kit, which provides tools and resources for municipalities to work with their residents to reduce recycling contamination and improve quality. Reducing contamination in single stream recycling will help to reduce processing costs and also increase available capacity.

Q: Does the specification in the statewide policy for glass cullet include quarry reclamation projects?

A: This would depend on the specific project and use. The policy does not allow this glass material to be used for general fill, but rather for specific purposes such as a drainage layer. If a project does not fit the specifications in the policy, an applicant could submit an application for a beneficial use determination to allow for a different use.

Q: Have you been in touch with the state Office of Business Development relative to the Ardagh facility closure? Is there anything that can be done to keep the plant around or find a buyer?

A: MassDEP Commissioner Suuberg has had discussions with Ardagh. MassDEP could speak with Office of Business Development to explore other alternatives. In addition, MassDEP is in discussions with other companies that may be able to process, produce and use recycled glass products.

New Solid Waste Reporting Forms System

Laurel Carlson of MassDEP provided an update on the development of solid waste applications and forms in the MassDEP online ePLACE system. For more information, see the presentation posted with the meeting summary.

Comment: The credit card payment option is a huge help.

Q: When will solid waste landfill authorization to operate (ATO) forms be online?

A: These will be available in April 2018.

Comment: Some landfill applications require anywhere from one to six additional submittals to address agency review comments. Hopefully the new ePLACE system can incorporate this process.

Response: Yes, these attachments can also be submitted through ePLACE.

Draft 2016 Solid Waste Data Update

John Fischer of MassDEP presented the draft 2016 Solid Waste Data Update. For more information, please see the presentation posted with this meeting summary.

Q: Are sludge landfills included in the "non-MSW" figure for in-state disposal?

A: No, sludge only landfills are not included in this data.

Q: What are non-MSW wastes?

A: These include materials such as asbestos containing material, contaminated soils, sludge disposed at MSW landfills, and coal ash, when managed in solid waste facilities.

Q: Moving forward, as statewide landfill capacity continues to shrink, Massachusetts is going to need to continue to rely on energy from waste. Where will MSW ash go?

A: There are some ash landfills that are not included in the solid waste disposal capacity analysis, however this is another capacity dynamic that will need to be considered going forward. MassDEP will be hiring a consultant to conduct a comprehensive materials management capacity analysis and we expect ash management to be considered as part of this capacity analysis.

Q: In table 7, why does the Combustion Capacity listed increase from 3,190,000 tons in 2016 to 3,518,225 tons in 2017 and future years?

A: This is an error in the capacity projections which MassDEP will correct in the final report. The figure shown for 2016 was based on actual tonnage accepted, while the figure shown for 2017 and beyond is the full permitted tonnage. However, because these facilities do not typically operate at 100% of capacity, this permitted capacity figure is overstated and will be adjusted in the final report.

Solid Waste Master Plan: Discussion of Commercial Waste Reduction & Recycling Market Development Strategies

John Fischer of MassDEP provided a presentation and led a discussion on Solid Waste Master Plan strategies specific to commercial waste reduction and market development. This presentation is posted along with this meeting summary.

Q: The action threshold for waste bans in solid waste facility guidance has changed from 20% to 10% in recent years. Has that impacted the failed load rate?

A: The MassDEP definition of failed load is broader – and can include loads with materials below the solid waste facility action levels. For example, loads with 10% or more cardboard have historically received follow-up, with the smaller violations receiving a letter and the more egregious violations resulting in enforcement. Because of this, the change in the solid waste facility action levels did not have a major effect on MassDEP's failed load rate over time.

Q: Are specific strategies being considered or developed to facilitate the reuse of unneeded materials?

A: MassDEP is increasingly focused on reuse through both RecyclingWorks and our municipal grant and assistance programs. In particular MassDEP is currently focusing on programs for materials such as textiles and office furniture. However, MassDEP is interested in continuing to grow our reuse strategies in the 2030 Master Plan.

Q: Does RecyclingWorks look upstream for waste reduction measures, for instance, recommending reusable crates instead of cardboard boxes?

A: Yes. MassDEP and RecyclingWorks look at what makes sense across the hierarchy and what solutions work for the business and their operations. Waxed cardboard, for instance, would benefit from a reduction strategy that looks upstream.

Q: Would it make sense to invite groups like the Mass Retailer's Association to SWAC meetings to try to raise the issue with retailers? Cardboard can have monetary value.

A: Yes. MassDEP has worked with them on related issues - there are also other organizations that can be leveraged for outreach and training. RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is currently preparing a waste ban guidance document for retailers, which recommends steps to achieve compliance. A Recycling IQ Kit for businesses would be helpful, in addition to the materials MassDEP has for residential programs.